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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,  
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMAN  
USAID/ANE/MEA  
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

#### Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, January 19, highlights reports about the blast that took place at the U.S. headquarters in Baghdad yesterday. Another lead story focuses on the domestic issue of plans for curricula "development", with Parliament's decision to refer the Ministry of Education's plan to its committee on education for further discussions.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "Three Israeli trends in the face of the Syrian initiative"

Columnist Abu Yazan writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (01/19): "Three Israeli trends have risen in response to the Syrian call for resuming negotiations, and not a single one is serious. They indicate the absence of Israeli partners for making peace.. The common link among the three trends is namely the lack of readiness to make peace, be that in the format of rejection, reservation or maneuvering .. Israel is not ready to make peace with Syrian. The Israeli proposals for Damascus are hard to swallow, and it is likely that the Syrian track will stay in limbo until a year after the [U.S.] elections."

-- "Is it not time for dawn to break the Iraqi dark night"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (01/19) editorializes: "Day in and day out, the looming dangers of the continued American occupation of Iraq and the threats resulting from the absence of a clear American agenda for the next stage become clearer. The escalation in the field and yesterday's attack show the lack of security in the presence of the occupiers and prove the high price that Iraqis are paying on a daily basis.. The Iraqi scene seems to be vulnerable to the worst and most dangerous possibilities, particularly with nationalistic, sectarian and ethnic disintegration reaching a level of congestion as witnessed in more than city and more than area in Iraq.. It is no longer sufficient to issue calls from one capital or another, or to settle for disavowing any relationship with Washington's plans and occupational practices. The deterioration of the Land of the Rafidayn will not stop with calls and demands, but with serious political and diplomatic salvation action on all levels."

-- "Sharon and three years of breaking china!"

Columnist Raja Talab writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (01/19): "When Ariel Sharon was elected in March 2001, most observers expected him to fail drastically and quickly end his political life. All expectations saw him as a raging bull in a china shop, breaking everything with every move. However, these expectations did not materialize. True, Sharon is Sharon, a raging bull, but he invested everything towards making the breaking of china a legitimate thing, starting with the protective wall in April 2000, through the policy of assassinations, to shelving the roadmap, and the building the separation wall, all the way to bombing the heart of Damascus. Sharon dedicated the three years of his term in the Israeli government to breaking everything, and succeeded with flying colors in taking everything back to square one. The question is: how did Sharon manage to implement his program (the breaking of china) so successfully without significant obstacles? There are a number of factors that contributed, and continue to contribute, to giving him the ability to continue his policy of keeping the peace process in the square one. The first of these factors is the U.S. bias, which has

always been present, but which became more strongly in favor of Sharon as a result of various Palestinian and Arab mistakes and regional developments. As for the Palestinian mistakes, they are as follows: The Intifada and the lack of a political program.. The failure of the Palestinian Authority to invest the events of 9/11 to bring it closer to the United States.. The Palestinian Authority's evasive approach towards the security requirements of the roadmap by trying to achieve a military truce with opposition factions, which made the Authority's security decision subject to these factions' political and regional interests."

GNEHM